

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr David Hedger, a prisoner at HMP Rye Hill, on 21 February 2020

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Our Vision

To carry out independent investigations to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer.

Our Values

We are:

Impartial: *we do not take sides*

Respectful: *we are considerate and courteous*

Inclusive: *we value diversity*

Dedicated: *we are determined and focused*

Fair: *we are honest and act with integrity*



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Summary

1. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman aims to make a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and community supervision. One of the most important ways in which we work towards that aim is by carrying out **independent** investigations into deaths, due to any cause, of prisoners, young people in detention, residents of approved premises and detainees in immigration centres.
2. We carry out investigations to understand what happened and identify how the organisations whose actions we oversee can improve their work in the future.
3. Mr David Hedger, who was 77 years old, died in hospital of cancer on 21 February 2020, while a prisoner at HMP Rye Hill. We offer our condolences to Mr Hedger's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the care Mr Hedger received at Rye Hill was equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community. She made one recommendation but as it did not relate to Mr Hedger's cause of death, we have not included it in this report.
5. We did not find any non-clinical issues of concern. We make no recommendations.

Investigation Process

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Hedger's clinical care at HMP Rye Hill.
7. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Hedger's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
8. One of the PPO's family liaison officers wrote to Mr Hedger's next of kin, his wife, to explain the investigation. She did not respond.

Previous deaths at Rye Hill

9. Mr Hedger was the 12th prisoner to die at Rye Hill since February 2018. All the previous deaths were from natural causes.

Key Events

10. On 5 February 2016, Mr David Hedger was sentenced to 15 years and six months in prison for sexual offences. On 2 December, he was moved to HMP Rye Hill.
11. On 24 January 2020, a prison nurse saw Mr Hedger after he complained of a lack of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain for the past three weeks. His clinical observations were normal, but the nurse was concerned about his condition and sent him to hospital.
12. Mr Hedger was admitted as an inpatient. Tests showed that Mr Hedger had metastatic cancer (cancer that has spread) in his chest and abdomen. He was advised that his condition was terminal, and that palliative care was the only treatment option available. He was discharged back to Rye Hill on 28 January. Prison healthcare staff put care plans in place and reviewed him regularly.
13. On 30 January, the prison appointed a family liaison officer for Mr Hedger. She remained in contact with Mr Hedger's family, offering support and advice.
14. On 10 February, a prison GP saw Mr Hedger. He considered Mr Hedger did not have a full understanding of his prognosis, mistakenly thinking he could live for six or seven years. However, there is evidence in Mr Hedger's medical records that he had in fact been told his prognosis was likely to be a matter of months.
15. Later the same day, a series of routine blood tests were carried out. The results showed that Mr Hedger had a low blood platelet count. Healthcare staff telephoned hospital staff for advice. They advised that Mr Hedger should be sent to hospital. Mr Hedger was subsequently admitted as an inpatient.
16. On 14 February, staff submitted an application for early release on compassionate grounds on Mr Hedger's behalf. However, as Mr Hedger had not received a prognosis of three months or less to live, his application could not be processed.
17. On 21 February, after carrying out a series of tests, hospital staff discovered Mr Hedger's cancer had spread to his liver and bloodstream. They telephoned prison healthcare staff and informed them there was no more they could do for Mr Hedger, and that they were withdrawing all further treatment. Prison healthcare staff told hospital staff that the prison could not offer Mr Hedger end of life care. Hospital staff offered to explore the option of a hospice bed.
18. However, Mr Hedger's condition continued to deteriorate and at 7.18pm on 21 February, he died. A hospital doctor confirmed his death at 8.14pm.
19. The coroner gave Mr Hedger's cause of death as metastatic cancer of unknown origin. Idiopathic thrombocytopenia (an immune disorder in which the blood does not clot normally) was listed as a contributory factor.

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